The West should be ‘less fearful’ of Islam, says Pope

Aili Winstanley Channer 03 December 2025, The Tablet Prev Next

Pope Leo XIV speaks to journalists aboard a flight to Rome at the end of his apostolic journey, following his departure from Beirut on Tuesday

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‘One of the great lessons that Lebanon can teach to the world is showing a land where Islam and Christianity are both respected, and that there is a possibility to live together, to be friends.’

Pope Leo said that Lebanon can offer Europe and North America a lesson in dialogue and friendship between Christians and Muslims.

He made the remarks during a press conference on his return flight from Beirut to Rome on 2 December, in which he also commented on the United States’ ongoing negotiations with the Middle East and with Russia.

Asked what he would say to Catholics in Europe who believe that Islam is a threat to a Christian identity of the West, Pope Leo responded: “In Europe, fears are present but often generated by people who are against immigration and trying to keep out people who may be from another country, another religion, another race. I would say that we all need to work together.

“All of the conversations that I had during my time both in Turkey and in Lebanon, including with many Muslims, were concentrated on the topic of peace and respect for people of different religions. One of the values of this trip is precisely to raise the world’s attention to the possibility that dialogue and friendship between Muslims and Christians is possible.

“One of the great lessons that Lebanon can teach to the world is precisely showing a land where Islam and Christianity are both present and are respected, and that there is a possibility to live together, to be friends.

Stories, testimonies and witnesses that we heard even in the past two days of people helping each other, Christians with Muslims, both of whom had had their villages destroyed, for example, were saying that we can come together and work together.

“Those lessons would be important also to be heard in Europe or North America: that we should perhaps be a little less fearful and look for ways of promoting authentic dialogue and respect.”

Asked if he would talk to Donald Trump and Benjamin Netanyahu to encourage an end to Israeli aggression against Lebanon and if he believes sustainable peace is achievable in the region, Pope Leo replied: “Yes, I believe sustainable peace is achievable. I have already, in a very small way, begun a few conversations with some of the leaders of places that you have mentioned and I would intend to continue to do that, to raise that call for peace.”

He alluded to diplomatic meetings taking place behind closed doors during his time in Turkey and Lebanon: “I also had personal meetings with representatives of different groups who actually represent political authorities: people or groups that also have something to do with internal or even international conflicts in the region. Our work is mainly not a public thing that we declare on the streets; it is a bit ‘behind the scenes’.

“It is something that we have already done and will continue to do: to try to convince the parties to leave their weapons and violence, and come together to the dialogue table, to seek answers and solutions that are not violent but that can be more effective, and better for the people.”

Pope Leo also said that although “the Holy See does not have a direct participation” in talks between Nato and Russia, Europe’s voice “is important”. He continued: “The Holy See can also encourage this type of mediation and that we seek together a solution that could truly offer peace, a just peace, in this case in Ukraine.”

The Pope said that he had received a message sent to him by the Lebanese Shia Islamist political party and paramilitary group Hezbollah. “Evidently there is, on the part of the Church, the proposal that they leave their weapons and that we seek dialogue. But, more than that, I prefer not to comment in this context.”

Pope Leo said that he hopes “to continue the discourse of dialogue, of building bridges between the Christian world and the Muslim world” in a future overseas trip to Africa. The first Augustinian pope, he expressed a wish to visit Algeria “to visit the places of St Augustine’s life”.

“It is interesting: the figure of St Augustine helps a lot as a bridge, because in Algeria, he is highly respected as a son of the homeland,” he said.